

Hockey heritage

After eight terms working to aid the state's youth, Milbert laces up with a different team — his family

By SARAH MCKENZIE

When Rep. Bob Milbert (DFL-South St. Paul) ponders his impact as a state lawmaker, he can point to 61 new ice rinks around the state.

Milbert, who won't seek re-election after 16 years, sponsored the "Mighty Ducks" legislation, which has provided more than \$18.4 million in state grants since 1995 to provide more ice sheets for hockey in local communities.

Spurred by an explosion in youth hockey participation — particularly among girls — the program has awarded grants up to \$250,000 for new facilities and \$50,000 for renovations. The state grants have leveraged \$122.8 million in local private and public dollars.

House Minority Leader Tom Pugh, a fellow South St. Paul DFLer who played hockey with Milbert in high school, called the legislator a "tireless advocate" for his constituents in District 39B, which includes South St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights.

"His experience and creative ideas will be missed," Pugh said. "It will be difficult to fill his shoes, and his skates."

Milbert played hockey while at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire where he earned a geography degree.

While some lawmakers have decided to leave the House because of redistricting, Milbert said he's decided to step down to spend more time with his wife and three children. He will also focus on his job as president of Milbert Company, a franchise of the Culligan water company.

Milbert's daughters, Melissa and Megan, share his hockey gene. They played for national championship hockey teams at Harvard University and the University of Minnesota, respectively.

Megan Milbert, 22, said she admires his work to increase involvement in athletics.

"He'll be known as someone who wanted full opportunities for Minnesota youth," she said.

A member of the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission since 1994, Milbert successfully pushed for a bonding request along with other commission members to build a youth golf course at the National Sports Center in Blaine.

"I have never worked as hard as I did to get



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Bob Milbert, a leader in creating athletic opportunities for Minnesota youth, is leaving the House after his term expires this year.

the state help for the kids golf facility," Milbert said. "It will surely be a model for other states when it is finally completed. The kids will have a place that they can call their own without competing with adults for tee times."

In addition to his sports advocacy, Milbert has focused on child safety and environmental issues while serving in the House.

At the beginning of his legislative career, Milbert sponsored legislation bolstering safety standards for residential garage door openers after the accidental deaths of four Minnesota children. The law has become a national model.

Milbert also carried the House game and fish bill for six years and authored an amendment to the state constitution preserving hunting and fishing rights ratified by Minnesota voters.

The amendment was adopted Nov. 3, 1998.

Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul) called Milbert a "thoughtful member committed to good public policy."

"He is an environmentalist in the best tradition," she said. "There are core values that I believe motivate him to respect nature and to protect resources. He has an intuitive sense about how to protect the environment and to protect our children's future."

House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty (R-Eagan), who also grew up in South St. Paul, called Milbert a strong and smart advocate with an "ability to build coalitions and friendships."

"We need more public servants like him," he said.

Before he was elected to the House, Milbert served on the South St. Paul City Council.


Frustration with a zoning ordinance sparked Milbert's political ambitions. The city blocked his efforts to build a garage for his home, but after some wrangling with the city Milbert was eventually able to construct the garage.

Angered by the restriction, Milbert decided to run for city council in 1972. He was elected and served for 12 years.

Then in 1986 Milbert was elected to the House.

Virginia Lanegran, who served on the city council with Milbert and worked as his House campaign manager, said that although the legislator's work on athletics often receives more attention, he has been champion of education and establishing uniform property taxes.

Milbert currently serves as co-chair of the House Ethics Committee and also serves on the body's Rules and Legislative Administration and Taxes committees. He is the DFL lead for the Taxes Committee's Property Tax Division.

Milbert had the following advice for his successor: "Be true to your word and treat everyone with respect and dignity — emphasis on everyone. If you follow that advice, you will have a rewarding and successful tenure as a legislator." 

STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Bob Milbert
DFL

District 39B — South St. Paul

Terms: 8

Career notes: Milbert authored legislation that has provided more than \$18 million in state grants to assist local communities in adding ice rinks. The lawmaker also sponsored a bill that added a clause in the state constitution preserving hunting and fishing rights.